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ABSTRACT

This brochure introduces a current initiative of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) under the chairmanship of Paul Patton, Governor of Kentucky, suggesting ways that political leaders, education policymakers, and institutional/faculty leaders can work together toward a more responsive, efficient postsecondary education system. Trends leading toward a "revolution" in postsecondary education are identified, including demographic changes, shifts in the job market, emergence of new information and communication technologies, and reform and innovation in K-12 education. A vision of the future is offered in which all segments of higher education are responsive, flexible, entrepreneurial, and accountable. State mandates, regulations, and funding formulas are seen as major impediments to improving postsecondary education. The ECS initiative will involve looking at various states' efforts to rethink and redesign postsecondary education. Key components of this initiative and planned activities over the next year are identified, including: (1) fostering a national dialogue on the redesign of the postsecondary education system; (2) development of a versatile set of resources, tools and strategies to assist states in this redesign process; (3) providing intensive technical assistance and support to states ready for this redesign; and (4) creating of mechanisms to accelerate and sustain change efforts. (DB)

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Transforming Postsecondary Education for the 21st Century

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PAUL E. PATTON
GOVERNOR OF KENTUCKY
1998-99 ECS CHAIRMAN

A strong, dynamic and efficient postsecondary education system is crucial to America's future. The strength of our economy, the quality of our workforce, the vitality of our communities, the productivity and well-being of our citizens depend on an education system that provides adults of all ages with the knowledge and skills they need to live, learn and work in a changing world.

In Kentucky, we have made improving postsecondary education the cornerstone of efforts to position our state as a leader in the global economy of the 21st century. With the active involvement of hundreds of people across the state — educators, political leaders, business executives and community members — we have developed a comprehensive strategic vision to guide the way we structure, use and invest in our postsecondary education resources over the next decade and beyond. Our goals are:

- *To ensure that the postsecondary education system is effectively linked to student needs, statewide priorities and economic growth plans for the 21st century*
- *To structure the postsecondary education system so that it is effectively coordinated and provides a seamless education process for all citizens*
- *To provide a financing structure and management processes for postsecondary education that encourage innovation, efficiency and excellence*
- *To support the development of nationally recognized research and graduate programs that will serve as incubators of economic growth*
- *To integrate state-of-the-art technology to maximize accessibility to and applicability of advanced knowledge.*

As 1998-99 chairman of the Education Commission of the States, I want to engage my fellow governors, legislators of both parties, business and community leaders, educators and the public in a far-reaching dialogue about the challenges and issues facing postsecondary education. Working together, I believe we can make quantum leaps in postsecondary education — in terms of efficiency, flexibility, accessibility and responsiveness — and significantly strengthen its ability to continue to meet the diverse and changing needs of our nation.

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TRANSFORMING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

America rightfully takes pride in its higher education system — the finest, most versatile, most accessible in the world, and one that has always shown a remarkable ability to innovate, adapt and evolve. Today, on the threshold of a new century, higher education must once again rise to the challenge, and muster the energy, creativity, courage and commitment to respond to new and changing needs.

How public leaders and public policy should assist in this process of transformation will be the focus for Kentucky Governor Paul Patton as 1998-99 chairman of the Education Commission of the States (ECS). His initiative is designed to engage political leaders, education policymakers, institutional and faculty leaders and others from across the country in a thoughtful reexamination of the following:

- The changing needs for postsecondary education
- The effectiveness of current public policies and institutional practices in meeting these needs
- The types of policies and policymaking processes best suited to helping create a more responsive, efficient postsecondary education system.

THE REVOLUTION AT HAND...

Demographic trends, shifts in the job market, the emergence of new information and communication technologies, ongoing reform and innovation in K-12 education and other developments have set the stage for a profound transformation of America's postsecondary education system.

Complex and interrelated forces are driving change in the nation's postsecondary education system: demographic trends, shifts in the job market, technological developments, and ongoing reform and innovation in elementary and secondary education.

The market for higher education has expanded well beyond young, post-high-school students going off to school for a traditional four-year program. Jobs requiring technical skills are growing in nearly every sector of the economy. Continuous change in what workers do and need to know suggests that learning, training and education will occur over the length of a career and, in fact, a lifetime. Thus, a large and growing segment of the market is made up of "nontraditional" students — working adults who are interested in enhancing their job skills, retooling for new positions and careers, and other customized learning experiences.

As demand continues to grow and change, postsecondary education is becoming a more intensively competitive, learner-defined enterprise. Students want programs that provide what they need, when they need it and how they need it delivered. This trend is reflected in tremendous surges in community college enrollment over the past decade, the proliferation of private providers offering both degree and specialized nondegree programs, and the expansion of on-the-job training and education programs.

The postsecondary education market also has been profoundly affected by the emergence of new communication and information technologies, which provide an opportunity to package and deliver learning programs in ways that better serve the needs of working adults and other nontraditional students. Conventional service patterns, based on geographic boundaries and traditional timeframes, are becoming obsolete as a growing number of both public and private providers use interactive video, the Internet and other distance-learning technologies to reach students.

Technology-based learning provides an important new tool for accommodating increased demand without additional capital

investment in classrooms, libraries and other facilities. But it also calls into question the continued usefulness of longstanding practices, policies and structures in such areas as budgeting, staffing, facilities management, faculty tenure, admissions requirements, assessment methods, tuition policies and certification of learning.

Postsecondary education faces a number of critical pressures. In most states, spending for higher education is constrained as other funding priorities — prisons, health care, transportation — claim an increasing share of state budgets. At the same time, higher education is under mounting pressure to improve performance, efficiency and accountability. There is growing frustration on the part of policymakers, business leaders and the public over issues such as cost, access, quality assurance, faculty productivity, the effectiveness of teacher education programs and the postsecondary system's lack of involvement in the K-12 reform movement.

Opinion polls show that Americans worry about whether they and their children will have access to, and be able to afford, the education that will open doors to a secure future. They are concerned about whether the programs provided by the nation's colleges and universities will indeed give them the knowledge, skills and abilities they need to succeed. And they are frustrated by the fact that they have no tangible way to assess the quality of postsecondary education or to influence the educational services provided.

Taken together, these developments and trends set the stage for a profound and wide-ranging transformation of America's postsecondary education system.

- But how ready, willing and able are the nation's postsecondary institutions to undertake reform?
- To what extent do traditional ways of governing, regulating and funding higher education impede innovation and improvement?
- And what can and should public leaders do to help guide, promote and sustain the process of transformation?

"The classroom will not disappear, nor will the campus fade into oblivion. Rather, American higher education in the 21st century will provide a spectrum of choices for learners, ranging from the truly traditional to the totally transformed."

— Michael Dolence

...THE TRANSFORMATION AHEAD

In the postsecondary system of the future, individual institutions will have greater flexibility to define and achieve their missions, with incentives to grow into new markets with new services.

Picture a postsecondary education system that serves as a flexible infrastructure for meeting diverse needs in a time of rapid change. This system would be versatile, accessible, attuned to new technologies and economic trends; capable of continuously redesigning itself around the needs of both traditional and nontraditional students; able to try out new things, take initiative and use resources wisely.

In such a system, all segments of higher education — community colleges, universities, research institutions, technical training schools — would be focused on working together to stay abreast of changing needs and market demand. Traditional boundaries would give way to new alliances among various segments of the postsecondary system and a stronger sense of partnership with K-12 education.

The transformed system would be responsive, flexible, entrepreneurial and accountable. In contrast to today's highly regulated and centrally managed system, individual institutions would have greater flexibility to define and achieve their missions, with incentives to grow into new markets with new services. Institutions would offer learning programs in a variety of settings and formats: traditional undergraduate and graduate classes, full-time and part-time attendance, on campus and off campus, synchronous and asynchronous, traditional degrees as well as new competency-based programs.

But such sweeping changes in institutional practices will not occur without a major overhaul of the public policies that shape postsecondary education. State leaders must rethink the role higher education plays in relation to economic and social needs and then carefully reexamine policies, structures and operating principles in light of this new vision.

Policymakers must face the fact that state mandates, regulations and funding formulas stand as major impediments to improving postsecondary education. They provide little incentive for institutions to work together on issues of mutual concern: improvement of lower-division instruction, purposeful growth, expansion of technology-based education programs. In many ways, they

place significant constraints on institutions' ability to cut costs, develop new programs, collaborate with one another and experiment with new ways of doing things.

Recognizing the need for change, a growing number of states are exploring and trying out new ways of structuring, governing and financing postsecondary education — decentralization and deregulation, performance-based funding models, increased investment in technology, a greater emphasis on strategic planning, coordination and partnership.

Blue-ribbon commissions, task forces and legislative committees studying various aspects of postsecondary restructuring are at work in Alabama, Kansas, Louisiana, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington and West Virginia. Several states — notably Kentucky, Minnesota, New Jersey and Virginia — have undertaken significant restructuring initiatives in the past few years.

In several states, efforts are under way to develop new frameworks to organize and assess learning inside, outside and between classrooms: the use of competency standards, dual enrollment options and the extension of standards-based education to the postsecondary level through K-16 councils and other mechanisms. Such initiatives will have a major impact on academic infrastructure — curricula, programs, credit transferability, degree requirements and, ultimately, faculty roles.

As part of the *Transforming Postsecondary Education for the 21st Century* initiative, ECS will take a close look at the shape, direction and progress of various states' efforts to rethink and redesign postsecondary education.

- How effective have such initiatives been in promoting change and improvement?
- What lessons have been learned by states on the forefront of reform? How can these insights and experiences be shared with education and policy leaders in other states?
- What resources, tools and strategies must be made available to states to accelerate and sustain reform?

State leaders must rethink the role higher education plays in relation to economic and social needs and then carefully reexamine policies, structures and operating principles in light of this new vision.

THE 1998-99 ECS CHAIRMAN'S INITIATIVE: STRATEGIES & OBJECTIVES

Under the leadership of its 1998-99 chairman, Governor Paul Patton of Kentucky, ECS over the next year will focus its efforts on helping state leaders develop a clearer understanding of the transformation that postsecondary education is undergoing, and on strengthening their ability to guide and facilitate this process. The key components of this initiative are:

Foster a national dialogue focused on rethinking and redesigning America's postsecondary education system

- Analyze and widely disseminate data from a new nationwide survey of the attitudes, views and concerns of governors, legislators and state higher education officials about postsecondary education
- Convene a bipartisan panel of political, education and business leaders focused on creating greater visibility for the critical challenges and demands facing postsecondary education
- Engage key national organizations and the media in debate and dialogue about how to promote change and innovation in postsecondary education.

Develop a versatile set of resources, tools and strategies to assist states in rethinking and redesigning their own postsecondary education systems

- Create a panel of leading thinkers and experts, under the direction of ECS President Frank Newman, to help inform and deepen the discussion of why, and how, postsecondary education is undergoing transformation
- Compile a guide to innovative programs, policies and practices being used by states to bring about change in the structure, funding, governance and performance of postsecondary education
- Compile a directory of policymakers, educators, researchers and other individuals who are on the forefront of postsecondary reform and innovation.

Provide intensive technical assistance and support to states that exhibit exceptional readiness for transforming their postsecondary education systems

- Convene and facilitate workshops to build stronger working relationships among key education and political leaders, and help strengthen public understanding of and support for postsecondary reform

- Provide teams of experts to help states assess the strengths and weaknesses of their existing postsecondary education system and analyze current and future needs

- Provide states with research and policy analysis to help states identify current and emerging policy options, based on experience and evidence of what works — and what does not work — in terms of producing desired results

- Offer customized technical support in such areas as leadership development, agenda building, strategic planning, implementation, evaluation and public engagement.

Create mechanisms to accelerate and sustain efforts to bring about change and innovation in postsecondary education

- Publish a report summarizing what was accomplished and what was learned as the result of ECS' intensive work with states

- Organize and convene a National Postsecondary Education Policy Workshop in July 1999 in conjunction with the ECS National Forum and Annual Meeting in Denver

- Sponsor, facilitate and provide discussion materials for workshops and seminars in other states interested in transforming their postsecondary education systems

- Maintain and regularly update an information clearinghouse that provides states with access to a wide variety of resources, tools and strategies useful in rethinking and redesigning postsecondary education

- Continue to create greater visibility for the critical issues and challenges facing postsecondary education, ranging from publishing articles and op-eds in national publications to organizing presentations at meetings of leading business, political and education organizations.

PAUL E. PATTON
GOVERNOR OF KENTUCKY
1998-99 ECS CHAIRMAN

Kentucky Governor Paul Patton has earned national recognition for his commitment to improving the quality and performance of Kentucky's postsecondary education system. Under his leadership, the state has developed a strategic vision for linking statewide needs with postsecondary education resources in order to provide students with the high-level skills and knowledge needed to compete and succeed in the global economy of the 21st century.

Born and reared in the mountains of Appalachian Kentucky, Patton was graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1959 with a degree in mechanical engineering. After a successful, 20-year career in the coal business, Patton turned to public service in the late 1970s. He served as deputy state transportation secretary, led the Kentucky Democratic Party and was elected to three terms as Pike County judge executive. He was elected lieutenant governor in 1991, and during his term served simultaneously as secretary of economic development. In 1995, he was elected governor.

Creating a more efficient, responsive postsecondary education system is the cornerstone of Patton's ambitious efforts to improve Kentucky's economy. His reform plan, approved in 1997 by the Kentucky General Assembly, will bring needed structural changes and provide for an additional $100 million a year in funding for postsecondary education.

Patton recently was named chairman of the Southern Regional Education Board and the Southern Growth Policies Board. He has served as chairman of the Economic Development and Commerce Committee of the National Governors' Association. He is one of eight governors serving on the National Education Goals Panel.

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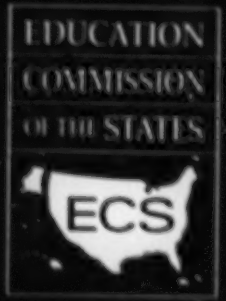

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